



# RSVP Operations Handbook

Version: 2018.1 (January 2018)

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*Corporation for*  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** 

## PREFACE

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*The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is an independent, federal grant-making government agency whose mission is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic participation through service and volunteering. For almost 20 years, CNCS—through its programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF), and Social Innovation Fund (SIF)—has helped to engage millions of citizens in meeting community and national challenges through service and volunteer action. CNCS provides grants to national and local nonprofits, schools, government agencies, faith-based and other community organizations and other groups committed to strengthening their communities through volunteering.*

*This RSVP Operations Handbook (Handbook) provides ideas and suggestions for effective practices in operating and managing many aspects of local RSVP projects. It is a technical assistance document and not a compliance guide. Many of the suggestions refer to specific sections of the federal regulations that govern RSVP, but the Handbook does not address all issues covered in the regulations. Sponsors and project directors are required to follow the RSVP Federal Regulations, published in [Title 45, Chapter XXV, Part 2553](#), of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). Sponsors and project directors with concerns or questions with respect to compliance should first consult the federal regulations, the terms and conditions of the grant award, and, if necessary, contact the appropriate CNCS State Office.*

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**Upon request, this material will be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities.**

change from Retired Senior Volunteer Program to Retired “and” Senior Volunteer Program to reflect that not all volunteers were retired.

Congress stated its expectations for CNCS through a statement of purpose (42 U.S.C. 12501) that, in part, included using national and volunteer service by Americans of all ages to:

- 1) Meet the unmet human, educational, environmental, and public safety needs of the United States without displacing existing vendors;
- 2) Renew the ethic of civic responsibility and the spirit of community throughout the United States;
- 3) Expand and strengthen existing service programs with demonstrated experience in providing structured service opportunities with visible benefits to the participants and the community; and
- 4) Provide tangible benefits to the communities in which national service is performed.

On April 21, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the [Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act](#), which reauthorized and expanded national service programs administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service. As part of the new legislation, competition was introduced for RSVP grants.

#### **1.3.5 AMERICORPS**

Since its founding in 1994, AmeriCorps engages Americans in intensive service at nonprofits, schools, public agencies, and community and faith-based groups across the country tackling pressing problems and mobilizing millions of volunteers for the organizations they serve through three programs: [AmeriCorps State and National](#) , [AmeriCorps VISTA](#), and [AmeriCorps NCCC](#) (National Civilian Community Corps). AmeriCorps members recruit, train, and supervise community volunteers, tutor and mentor youth, build affordable housing, teach computer skills, clean parks and streams, run after-school programs, help communities respond to disasters, and build the capacity of nonprofit groups to become self-sustaining, among many other activities. In exchange for a term of service, members earn a living allowance and a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award that can be used to pay for college or graduate school, or to pay back qualified student loans.

#### **1.3.6 SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND**

Authorized by the [Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act in April of 2009](#), the [Social Innovation Fund](#) is a program of CNCS that empowers organizations to identify and support sustainable solutions that are already making a significant impact in transforming communities.

With the simple but vital goal of finding what works, and making it work for more people, the Social Innovation Fund and its' grantees create a learning network of organizations working to implement innovative and effective evidence-based solutions to local and national challenges in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.

- Where can I find information about required National Service Criminal History Checks?  
[National Service Criminal History Checks](#)
- Where can I find information about days of service?  
[Special Initiatives](#)
- Where can I find information about the changes in the OMB Circulars?  
[Uniform Guidance](#)
- I work for a faith-based organization. Are we eligible to apply for CNCS grants?  
[Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships](#)
- I'm interested in promoting your programs to my organization's constituents. Where can I order brochures or other promotional materials?  
[Outreach Resources](#)  
[Marketing and Media](#)  
[Senior Corps Branding Guidelines](#)
- How do I find Senior Corps programs in my own community?  
[National Service in Your State](#)
- I'm a grantee and am looking for Senior Corps photos to use in our brochures. Where can I find them?  
[Outreach Resources](#)  
[Marketing and Media](#)  
[Logos](#)
- Where can I find resources for working with Veterans and Military Families?  
[Veterans and Military Families](#)

#### 1.4.2.3 *Partnerships and Program Support*

OEA develops and manages partnerships and alliances that strengthen the impact and broaden the reach of national service. It is authorized to solicit and accept private donations which support CNCS programs and initiatives. Additionally, OEA takes the lead in producing many events connected to the agency's signature projects such as the [Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service](#), [Senior Corps Week](#), the [September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance](#), [Mayor, County, and Tribal Recognition Day for National Service](#) and [AmeriCorps Week](#).

In 2015, the Office of External Affairs developed an annual engagement calendar that promotes monthly activities, events and media related to our programmatic focus areas and partnerships that make service and social innovation possible.

#### [\*National and Community Service Initiatives\*](#)

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CNCS encourages participation in community-wide service activities. OEA works with CNCS programs to support both our signature projects such as MLK Day of Service, as well as other national service initiatives like the September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance, Mayor and County Recognition Day for National Service, Opening Day for National Service, Veterans Corps, and Senior

## 2 PROJECT OPERATIONS

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### 2.1 ELIGIBILITY, AWARDS, AND SPONSORSHIP

#### 2.1.1 Sponsor Eligibility

The CNCS awards federal RSVP grants to public agencies, Indian Tribes, and secular and faith-based private non-profit organizations in the United States, that have authority to accept and the capacity to administer RSVP projects.

#### 2.1.2 Solicitation of Proposals

When federal RSVP grants are available CNCS conducts a grant competition. A Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA) is issued when funding for a grant competition has been appropriated by Congress (or a Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFO) is issued when funding for a grant competition is anticipated but not yet available). The NOFA or NOFO may also be referred to as the “*Notice*” in application related instructions. Any eligible agency or organization may apply for an RSVP grant. Notices are posted at [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and at the [Funding Opportunities](https://www.fundingopportunities.gov) on CNCS website [NationalService.gov](https://www.nationalservice.gov). Notices will be shared broadly through national and local networks.

#### 2.1.3 Submission of a Grant Application

Grant applications are submitted in the CNCS electronic grants system. Applications are submitted following the *Notice* instructions and using the forms included with the *Invitation to Apply* and *Notice* on the [Funding Opportunities](https://www.fundingopportunities.gov) webpage. The application must be submitted by a representative of the sponsor who is authorized by its governing body to certify that all data in the application are true and correct, the application has been duly authorized by the governing body of the applicant, and the applicant will comply with the Assurances submitted with the application, if the assistance is awarded. (See [Appendix A.1](#) and [Appendix A.2](#) to review the Assurances and Certifications.)

#### 2.1.4 “Self-Sponsored” Projects

In some situations, project staff, advisory councils, boards, or other interested persons, have incorporated as an independent non-profit organization and successfully competed to become a sponsor. These so-called “self-sponsored” projects must meet all the administrative and programmatic requirements associated with sponsorship addressed in the program regulations. CNCS neither encourages nor discourages self-sponsorship, but recommends that groups considering this option fully explore the advantages and disadvantages applicable to their situation and consult with other organizations who have taken this step. Contact your [CNCS State Office](#) for further information.

### 2.2 SPONSOR RESPONSIBILITIES

#### 2.2.1 Regulations Requirements

The sponsor is legally responsible for fulfilling all project management responsibilities necessary to accomplish the purposes of the program and may not delegate or contract these responsibilities to another entity. Sponsor responsibilities are listed in [45 CFR 2553 Subpart B](#) of the RSVP regulations. A few key responsibilities are listed here:

- 1) Focus RSVP resources on activities that will have a positive impact on critical human and social needs within the project service area, and in compliance with CNCS performance measure requirements.
- 2) Develop and manage a system of volunteer stations to provide a variety of placement opportunities that appeal to persons age 55 and over by:
  - a) Ensuring that a volunteer station is a public agency, Indian Tribe, or non-profit private organization, whether secular or faith-based, or an eligible proprietary health care agency, that has the capacity to serve as a volunteer station. (Proprietary health care organizations are health care facilities that are privately owned and operated for profit. Refer to Chapter 6 for more information about volunteers at health care agencies and volunteer stations.)
  - b) Ensuring the placement of RSVP volunteers is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the sponsor and each volunteer station. (See *Preparation of the Memorandum of Understanding* in Chapter 6, for more information.)
  - c) Annually assessing the placement of RSVP volunteers to ensure the safety of volunteers and their impact on meeting the needs of the community. CNCS does not have a required tool for the annual safety assessment (See [Appendix B.8](#)). Grantees can use checklists, questionnaires, email assurances, or other documentation that enables them to meet the requirement. The annual documentation is in addition to the safety clause in the MOU. The safety clause in the MOU, while a critical element, is not an assessment nor does it have an annual requirement; and general observations while on a site visit do not constitute an assessment.
  - d) Comply with and ensure that all volunteer stations comply with all applicable civil rights laws and regulations, including providing reasonable accommodation, where appropriate, to qualified individuals with disabilities to serve or participate in the RSVP project. (See [Appendix A.4](#), *Primer on Civil Rights Compliance*.)
- 3) Make special efforts to recruit and place into RSVP volunteer service individuals from diverse races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, or degrees of English language proficiency, Veterans and military family members, persons with disabilities, and hard-to-reach populations and groups in the community which are underrepresented in the project. The sponsor should stress the recruitment and enrollment of persons not already volunteering.
- 4) Provide RSVP volunteers with cost reimbursements specified in [45 CFR 2553.43](#), as well as recognition of their service.
- 5) Secure community participation in local project operation by establishing an advisory council. (See Chapter 4, *Community Participation*, for additional information.)
- 6) Develop, and annually update, a plan for promoting service by older adults within the project service area. [45 CFR 2552.23\(f\)](#) Suggested elements of such a plan include:
  - a) Communicating the importance of the project to the sponsor's board, the advisory council, staff, and volunteers;

- Assist in assessing community needs;
- Assist in fund raising and resource development;
- Support the development of a service ethic in the community;
- Advise on volunteer recruitment, retention, and recognition strategies;
- Suggest candidates for project staff positions;
- Link the project with other community service resources, including faith-based organizations;
- Advise on data collection and performance measurement;
- Assess project accomplishments and impact, including progress toward meeting performance measures;
- Assess satisfaction of volunteers and volunteer stations;
- Conduct annual assessment of safety of volunteers and volunteer stations (See [Appendix B.8](#));
- Suggest ways the project can gain increased visibility and recognition in the community; and/or
- Advise on how trends in the community are affecting seniors.

RSVP projects should keep thorough records of advisory council participation and structure such as the group's bylaws, current membership, and meeting minutes. Additional resources on [Understanding the Roles and Responsibilities of Advisory Councils](#) can be found on the Knowledge Network.

#### 4.2.3 Membership

Remember, an effective advisory council can expand the capacity of the sponsor and project staff. The advisory council must have a membership that includes people [\[45 CFR 2553.24\]](#):

- Knowledgeable of human and social needs of the community;
- Competent in the field of community service and volunteerism;
- Capable of helping the sponsor meet its administrative and program responsibilities including project assessment, fund-raising, publicity, and data reporting requirements;
- With interest in and knowledge of the capability of older adults;
- Who are of a diverse composition that reflects the demographics of the service area.

Additional resources on [Building an Effective Advisory Council](#) can be found on the Knowledge Network.

#### 4.2.4 Allowability of Costs

As advisory councils are required by Senior Corps regulations, grantees may expend reasonable amounts to support their activities. Such costs should still meet all other aspects of OMB cost principles, including being allowable, allocable, reasonable and necessary, as well as being documented sufficiently.

## 6 VOLUNTEER STATIONS

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

RSVP volunteers are recruited and enrolled by the RSVP project and placed with or through volunteer stations. Volunteer stations are encouraged to support RSVP by referring prospective volunteers to the project.

#### 6.1.1 Characteristics of Volunteer Stations

A volunteer station is a public agency, secular or faith-based private non-profit organization, or proprietary health care organization that accepts the responsibility for assignment and supervision of RSVP volunteers. Each volunteer station must be licensed or otherwise certified, when required, by the appropriate state or local government. Neither informal groups nor private homes qualify as volunteer stations. [[45 CFR 2553.12\(s\)](#)]

Proprietary health care organizations are health care facilities that are privately owned and operated for profit. As noted above, licensed proprietary health-care organizations may be volunteer stations. All such placements must limit volunteer assignments to those which provide direct and traditional assistance to patients, such as visiting, teaching, counseling, entertaining, etc. Placements must not displace paid employees, must not supplant the hiring of paid employees, and must avoid other staff or clerical assignments which would accrue to the profitability of the proprietary health-care organization.

The Memorandum of Understanding with such volunteer stations must include detailed provisions to ensure compliance with program regulations regarding *Non-displacement of Employed Workers and Non-impairment of Contracts for Service* [[45 CFR 1216.1.1 - 1216.1.4](#)]

Individual private homes may not be volunteer stations. In-home assignments are made only through a volunteer station (see *In-Home Assignments* in Chapter 7).

Volunteer stations are located within the project's service area as defined in the approved grant application.

#### 6.1.2 Types of Volunteer Stations

RSVP volunteers may serve in many different types of volunteer stations, including, but not limited to:

Examples of Volunteer Stations	
Before/After School Programs	Health Education Programs
Community Development Non-Profits	Hospitals/Medical Centers
Corrections Facilities	Job Placement Centers
Elementary Schools	Secondary Schools
Environmental Programs	Shelters (homeless, abused, etc.)
Food Banks/Gleaning Programs	Tax Preparatory Centers
Head Start Programs	Veterans Service Centers



## 13 RSVP HANDBOOK CROSS REFERENCE INDEX

### URL Links and Appendices Documents by Chapter

This index lists the links and appendices documents that are included in the RSVP Handbook for easy reference. The chart lists the chapter, the name of the link, the complete URL that you can click or cut-and-paste into your browser, and the number and title of the appendix document.

Links to [RSVP Program Regulations](#): All of the Handbook chapters have links to the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations. The regulations governing RSVP are in Chapter XXV, Part 2553, of the Code of Federal Regulations which is typically cited as “45 CFR 2553.” Use the reference numbers in the link to find the specific regulation you need. (For example: [45 CFR 2553.22](#) refers to the *Responsibilities of RSVP Sponsor*.)

URL for 45 CFR 2553:

<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&rgn=div5&view=text&node=45:4.1.9.11.35&idno=45>

Chapter 1	
AmeriCorps NCCC webpage	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps/ameriCorps-nccc">http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps/ameriCorps-nccc</a>
AmeriCorps Programs webpage	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps">http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps</a>
AmeriCorps State & National webpage	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps/ameriCorps-state-and-national">http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps/ameriCorps-state-and-national</a>
AmeriCorps VISTA webpage	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps/ameriCorps-vista">http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps/ameriCorps-vista</a>
CNCS Electronic Grants System	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/egrants">http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/egrants</a>
CNCS Logo webpage	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/outreach-resources/logos">http://www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/outreach-resources/logos</a>
CNCS National Performance Measures	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/performance-measurement">http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/performance-measurement</a>
CNCS Strategic Plan	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/strategic-plan">http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/strategic-plan</a>
Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1990_serveact_as%20amended%20through%20pl%20111-13.pdf">http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1990_serveact_as%20amended%20through%20pl%20111-13.pdf</a>
eGrants Helpdesk/ National Service Hotline	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/egrants">http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/egrants</a>
Evaluation Resources	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation">http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation</a>
Evidence Exchange	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange">http://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange</a>
Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/special-initiatives/communities/faith-based-and-other-community-initiatives-and-neighborhood">http://www.nationalservice.gov/special-initiatives/communities/faith-based-and-other-community-initiatives-and-neighborhood</a>
Financial Management Resources	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/financial-management">http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/financial-management</a>
Foster Grandparent Program webpage	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/senior-corps/foster-grandparents">http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/senior-corps/foster-grandparents</a>
Funding Opportunities Webpage	<a href="http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities">http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities</a>
Litmos (CNCS' Learning Management System)	<a href="https://cncsonlinecourses.litmos.com/">https://cncsonlinecourses.litmos.com/</a>
Litmos Self-Sign Up	<a href="https://cncsonlinecourses.litmos.com/self-signup/">https://cncsonlinecourses.litmos.com/self-signup/</a>

## Appendix A.1 - Assurances

Section 176(c) of the Clean Air Act of 1955, as amended (42 U.S.C. 7401 et seq.); (g) protection of underground sources of drinking water under the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974, as amended (P.L. 93-523); and (h) protection of endangered species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (P.L. 93-205).

- Will comply with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 (16 U.S.C. 1271 et seq.) related to protecting components or potential components of the national wild and scenic rivers system.
- Will assist the awarding agency in assuring compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470), EO 11593 (identification and protection of historic properties), and the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974 (16 U.S.C. 469a-1 et seq.).
- Will comply with P.L. 93-348 regarding the protection of human subjects involved in research, development, and related activities supported by this award of assistance.
- Will comply with the Laboratory Animal Welfare Act of 1966 (P.L. 89-544, as amended, 7 U.S.C. 2131 et seq.) pertaining to the care, handling, and treatment of warm blooded animals held for research, teaching, or other activities supported by this award of assistance.
- Will comply with the Lead-Based Paint Poisoning Prevention Act (42 U.S.C. §§ 4801 et seq.) which prohibits the use of lead based paint in construction or rehabilitation of residence structures.
- Will cause to be performed the required financial and compliance audits in accordance with the Single Audit Act of 1984, as amended, and OMB Circular A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non-Profit Organizations.
- Will comply with all applicable requirements of all other Federal laws, executive orders, regulations, application guidelines, and policies governing this program.

### For AmeriCorps State and National Applicants ONLY

*If you are not applying for a grant through AmeriCorps\*State and National, you may ignore this section.*

1. Will comply with all rules regarding prohibited activities, including those stated in applicable Notice, grant provisions, and program regulations, and will ensure that no assistance made available by the Corporation will be used to support any such prohibited activities.
2. Will comply with the nondiscrimination provisions in the national service laws, which provide that an individual with responsibility for the operation of a project or program that receives assistance under the national service laws shall not discriminate against a participant in, or member of the staff of, such project or program on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, political affiliation, disability, or on the basis of religion. (NOTE: the prohibition on religious discrimination does not apply to the employment of any staff member paid with non- Corporation funds or paid with Corporation funds but employed with the organization operating the project prior to or on the date the grant was awarded. If your organization is a faith-based organization that makes hiring decisions on the basis of religious belief, your organization may be entitled, under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, 42 U.S.C. § 2000bb, to receive federal funds and yet maintain that hiring practice, even though the national service legislation includes a restriction on religious discrimination in employment of staff hired to work on a Corporation-funded project and paid with Corporation grant funds. (42 U.S.C. §§ 5057(c) and 12635(c)). For the circumstances under which this may occur, please see the document “Effect of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act on Faith-Based Applicants for Grants” on the Corporation’s website at: <http://www.usdoj.gov/archive/fbci/effect-rfra.pdf>.
3. Will comply with all other federal statutes relating to nondiscrimination, including any self-evaluation requirements. These include but are not limited to: (a) Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-352) which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin; (b) Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, as amended (20 U.S.C. 1681-1683, and 1685-1686), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex; (c) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. 794), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of handicaps (d) The Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended (42 U.S.C. 6101-6107), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of age; (e) The Drug Abuse Office and Treatment Act of 1972 (P.L. 92-255), as amended, relating to nondiscrimination on the basis of drug abuse; (f) The Comprehensive Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Act of 1970 (P.L. 91-616), as amended, relating to nondiscrimination on the basis of alcohol abuse or alcoholism; (g) sections 523 and 527 of the Public Health Service Act of 1912 (42 U.S.C. 290 dd-3 and 290 ee-3), as amended, relating to confidentiality of alcohol and drug abuse patient records; (h) Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3601 et seq.), as amended, relating to nondiscrimination in the sale, rental or financing of housing; and (i) the requirements of any other nondiscrimination statute(s) which may apply to the application.
4. Will provide, in the design, recruitment, and operation of any AmeriCorps program, for broad-based input from – (1) the community served, the municipality and government of the county (if appropriate) in which the community is located, and potential participants in the program; and (2) community-based agencies with a demonstrated record of